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2 Your Internal Billing Reference

TRAVL.002A

OPTIONAL

3 To

Recipient's
Name Holley Christen

Phone (315) 463-9695

Company Cruises, Inc.

Address 5000 Campuswood Drive

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State NY ZIP 13057

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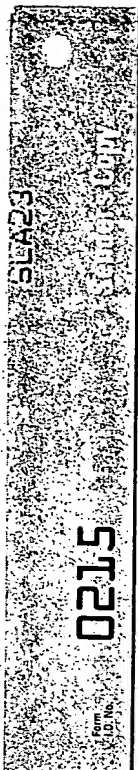
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December 13, 2000

VIA FEDERAL EXPRESS

Holley Christen
Cruises, Inc.
5000 Campuswood Drive
East Syracuse, NY 13057

Re: U.S. Patent Applications filed December 1, 2000
Titles: SYSTEMS AND METHODS OF ON-LINE BOOKING OF CRUISES
SYSTEMS AND METHODS OF COMPARING PRODUCT
INFORMATION
SYSTEMS AND METHODS OF DISPLAYING CRUISE LINE
PRICING DATA
SYSTEMS AND METHODS OF MAINTAINING CLIENT
RELATIONSHIPS
SYSTEMS AND METHODS OF MATCHING CUSTOMER
PREFERENCES WITH AVAILABLE OPTIONS
Our Reference Nos.: TRAVL.002A/017A/018A/019A/020A

Dear Holley:

We are enclosing a copy of the above-identified patent applications, including formal drawings, together with a Declaration by Inventor and an Assignment form for each application. In addition, we have enclosed a memo listing the inventors in your office that need to review and sign the enclosed documents.

United States patent laws require that the applications describe the inventions, and the methods for making and using them, completely and accurately such that a person who has an ordinary amount of skill in the technology pertaining to these inventions could, after reviewing the application, make and use the inventions. Additionally, the patent laws require that the applications set forth the preferred implementations or "best modes" of carrying out the

Holley Christen
December 13, 2000
Page -2-

inventions. If the applications would not permit such persons of ordinary skill to make and use the inventions, or if you or the inventors, at this time, know of a better way to make or use your inventions than that which is described in the enclosed applications, please let us know immediately.

Please have the inventors carefully read the enclosed patent applications in connection with the above requirements, and if there is anything in the applications that appears to be incomplete or inaccurate, or that may be misleading, then contact us at once.

If the applications are accurate and complete in their present form, please have the inventors read the Declarations which are enclosed. The inventors must carefully consider certain matters before signing the Declarations.

The Declarations state that there is a duty to disclose information regarding earlier developments and the like which may be material to the examination of the application. If you, the inventors, or anyone connected with the patent application process know of such information now or learn of any while the applications are pending in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, please advise us promptly.

Further, the Declarations state that the inventors are actual inventors of the subject matter which is claimed. If you or any of the inventors have reason to believe that one or more of the listed inventors may not be an inventor, or if you or any of the inventors believe any inventors may have been omitted, please contact us immediately.

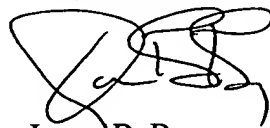
If there is anything in the Declarations or in these instructions the inventors do not understand, please let us know so that we can clarify the matter. If corrections to the applications are required, please contact us as soon as possible.

If the applications are accurate and complete in their present form, please have the inventors sign and date the enclosed Declarations where indicated. If there are inaccuracies in the inventor's name, address, or country of citizenship, please have the inventor make the correction to the Declarations and the Assignments and initial his or her changes. Please note that the assignments must be notarized. Also, while the inventors may sign at different times, each inventor should execute his/her Declarations and Assignments on the same day. After execution, please return the papers to us for filing in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Holley Christen
December 13, 2000
Page -3-

If you have any questions or comments, please call.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JB Bear', written over a large, stylized, handwritten 'X' or 'Z' mark.

James B. Bear

Enclosures

cc: Amy C. Christensen

MEMORANDUM

TO: Holley Christen

FROM: Amy C. Christensen

RE: Cruise Control Patent Applications – Formal Documents
Our Ref. Nos.: TRAVL.002A, TRAVL.017A, TRAVL.018A, TRAVL.019A,
TRAVL.020A.

DATE: December 8, 2000

Please have the following inventors sign the Declaration and Assignment documents:

- ☐ Joanel DeLand
- ☐ Tim Moorhead
- ☐ Holley Christen

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SYSTEMS AND METHODS OF COMPARING PRODUCT INFORMATION**RELATED APPLICATIONS**

5 This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/168,871 filed December 3, 1999, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. In addition, this application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application filed concurrently and entitled "SYSTEMS AND METHODS OF ON-LINE BOOKING OF CRUISES," internal reference number TRAVL.002A, which is hereby
10 incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

 The present systems and methods relate generally to the field of on-line product comparisons and in particular concern applications designed to facilitate cruise price comparisons, reservations, booking, and customer management by travel agents as well
15 as individual customers.

BACKGROUND

 The growth of the cruise industry has created an increase in the number of passenger cruise lines that sail each year. Each cruise line offers a variety of cruise packages, and the cruise packages vary depending on destination, sailing date, cruise
20 ship, cabin category, excursions, special discounts, and so forth. While such variety offers great selection to potential customers, finding the cruise package that best fits the customer's budget and preferences is a difficult task. As a result, travel agents often spend large amounts of time and energy sorting through a myriad of cruise information to find cruises that are of interest to the customer.

25 One common problem is that conventional approaches make it difficult to view cruise package and pricing information namely because there is a large amount of cruise data associated with each cruise package. For example, cruise data may include itinerary, cabin type, cabin location, number of persons per cabin, group block discounts, and so forth. Viewing this large amount of data can be quite difficult.

30 Another common problem is that the large amount of cruise package and pricing information makes it difficult to compare accurately various cruise packages. It is

cumbersome to view information for a single cruise package and even more difficult to view information for multiple cruise packages. Regardless of the difficulty, the customer needs to know the details of each cruise package in order to determine which cruise package is the "best deal." For example, suppose X offers a cruise to Panama for \$3000 and Y offers a similar cruise to Panama for \$2800. Y appears to be a better deal until the customer learns that X's price is for the Presidential Suite and Y's price is for a Fourth Class cabin. Access to cruise package pricing information is critical.

An additional problem is that travel agents spend large amounts of time determining the preferences of each individual customer, finding cruise packages that meets the customer's needs, and booking the cruise package. A travel agent spends, on average, well over one hour with each customer manually sifting through piles of paper documentation and is constantly on the phone with cruise lines to get current information, such as availability and pricing.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One embodiment of the present invention is a method of providing cruise package and pricing information for comparison utilizing a cruise web server environment to electronically communicate via a data communications network with a plurality of remote users using web browser programs. The method comprises receiving a selection of at least two cruise packages from a remote user's web browser program, and obtaining cruise package and pricing information that corresponds to the at least two cruise packages from an electronic database of cruise data. The method also comprises preparing the cruise package and pricing information for display in an electronic web document and sending the prepared cruise package pricing information to the remote user's web browser program.

Another embodiment of the present invention is a method of using a computer to compare cruise package and pricing information utilizing a cruise web server environment to electronically communicate via a data communications network with a plurality of remote users using web browser programs. The method comprises receiving a request for cruise package and pricing information for at least two cruise different cruise lines from a remote user's web browser program, retrieving cruise package and pricing information that corresponds to the request from a database of

electronically stored cruise line data, and outputting the cruise package and pricing information for display as an electronic document by the remote user's web browser program.

5 An additional embodiment of the present invention is a method of requesting cruise package and pricing information for comparison using a web browser program to electronically communicate with a remote cruise web server system via a data communications network. The method comprises sending a request to the remote cruise web server system for cruise package and pricing information for at least two different cruise lines and receiving cruise package and pricing information from the remote cruise
10 web server system that corresponds to the request, wherein the cruise package and pricing information was retrieved from an electronic database of cruise line data and the cruise package and pricing information is formatted for side-by-side display by the web browser program.

Another embodiment of the present invention is a method of using a computer to
15 book a cruise package using a web browser program to electronically communicate with a remote cruise web server system via a data communications network. The method comprises sending a request to the remote cruise web server system for cruise package and pricing information for at least two cruise different cruise ships and receiving from the remote cruise web server system the cruise package and pricing information for the
20 at least two different cruise ships, wherein the cruise package and pricing information is displayed in a side-by-side display using the web browser program.

An additional embodiment of the present invention is a network node in a network comprising a user node having a browser program coupled to the network, the user node providing requests for information on the network. The network node
25 comprises a cruise booking node responsive to a request to retrieve cruise package and pricing information for at least two different cruise lines from the user node, wherein the cruise booking node retrieves cruise package and pricing information from an electronic database for display in an electronic document and sends the cruise package and pricing information to the user node.

30 Another embodiment of the present invention is a system for comparing cruise packages implemented in a web server environment, wherein a plurality of remote users

using web browser programs electronically communicate with the system via a data communications network. The system comprises an electronically stored data structure of cruise package and pricing information wherein the cruise package and pricing information includes information from different cruise lines, a program module
5 configured to receive a display request from a remote user's web browser program, and a program module configured to obtain cruise package and pricing information from the electronically stored data structure based at least upon the display request. The system also comprises a program module configured to prepare the obtained cruise package and pricing information for display in an electronic web document, and a program module
10 configured to output to the remote user's web browser program the prepared cruise package and pricing information for display in the electronic web document.

An additional embodiment of the present invention is a method of organizing cruise package and pricing information for display utilizing a cruise selling and booking web server system to electronically communicate via a data communications network
15 with a plurality of remote users using web browser programs. The method comprises receiving a first identifier corresponding to a first cruise package from a remote user's web browser program, retrieving a first set of cruise package and pricing information from an electronic database, wherein the first set of cruise package and pricing information corresponds to the first identifier, and receiving a second identifier
20 corresponding to a second cruise package from the remote user's web browser program. The method also comprises retrieving a second set of cruise package and pricing information from the electronic database, wherein the second set of cruise package and pricing information corresponds to the second identifier, formatting at least a portion of the first set of cruise package and pricing information and at least a portion of the
25 second set of cruise package and pricing information for display in a side-by-side comparison section of an electronic document, wherein the side-by-side comparison section includes at least a first window and a second window, and returning to the remote user's web browser program the formatted at least a portion of the first set of cruise package and pricing information and at least a portion of the second set of cruise
30 package and pricing information.

Another embodiment of the present invention is a method of using a computer to compare cruise package information using a web browser program to electronically communicate with a remote cruise web server system via a data communications network. The method comprises sending a request for a first set of cruise package and pricing information to the remote cruise web server system and sending a request for a second set of cruise package and pricing information to the remote cruise web server system. The method also comprises receiving from the remote cruise web server system the first set of cruise package and pricing information in a first window of a display, wherein the display is included in a web document accessible by the web browser program, and receiving from the remote cruise web server system the second set of cruise package and pricing information in a second window of the display.

An additional embodiment of the present invention is a method of providing cruise package information for display utilizing a cruise web server environment to electronically communicate via a data communications network with a plurality of remote users using web browser programs. The method comprises receiving a request for cruise package and pricing information from a remote user's web browser program, determining whether a card is available; if there is no card available, returning an error message to the remote user's web browser program, and if card is available, retrieving the requested cruise package and pricing information from an electronic database of cruise data and returning to the remote user's web browser program the cruise package and pricing information for electronic display in an available card.

Another embodiment of the present invention is a system for comparing cruise package information implemented in conjunction with a web browser program, wherein the web browser program communicates with a remote cruise web server system via a data communications network. The system comprises a selection software component configured to send requests to the remote cruise web server system for cruise package and pricing information for at least two cruise packages and a display software component configured to display in the web browser program the requested cruise package and pricing information for the at least two cruise packages in a side-by-side display as part of an electronic document.

An additional embodiment of the present invention is a method of providing cruise package and pricing information for comparison utilizing a cruise web server environment to electronically communicate via a data communications network with a plurality of remote users using web browser programs. The method comprises means
5 for receiving a selection of at least two cruise packages from a remote user's web browser program and obtaining cruise package and pricing information that corresponds to the at least two cruise packages from an electronic database of cruise data. The method also comprises means for preparing the cruise package and pricing information for display in an electronic web document and means for sending the prepared cruise
10 package pricing information to the remote user's web browser program.

Another embodiment of the present invention is a method of using a computer to book a cruise package using a web browser program to electronically communicate with a remote cruise web server system via a data communications network. The method comprises means for sending a request to the remote cruise web server system for cruise
15 package and pricing information for at least two cruise different cruise ships and means for receiving from the remote cruise web server system the cruise package and pricing information for the at least two different cruise ships, wherein the cruise package and pricing information is displayed in a side-by-side display using the web browser program.

For purposes of summarizing the invention, certain aspects, advantages, and novel features of the invention are described herein. It is to be understood that not necessarily all such advantages may be achieved in accordance with any particular
20 embodiment of the invention. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention may be embodied or carried out in a manner that achieves one advantage or group of advantages as taught herein without necessarily achieving other advantages as may be
25 taught or suggested herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features will now be described with reference to the drawings summarized below. These drawings and the associated description are provided to
30 illustrate embodiments of the invention and not to limit the scope of the invention. Throughout the drawings, reference numbers are re-used to indicate correspondence

among referenced elements. In addition, the first digit of each reference number indicates the figure in which the element first appears.

Figure 1 illustrates a high-level block diagram of one embodiment of the present invention.

5 Figure 2A illustrates a high-level block diagram of one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2B illustrates a high-level block diagram of an additional embodiment of the present invention.

10 Figure 3A illustrates a high-level block diagram of one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3B illustrates a high-level block diagram of an additional embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 illustrates a high-level block diagram of a comparison module.

Figure 5 illustrates one embodiment of a compare display template.

15 Figure 6A illustrates one embodiment of a compare display.

Figure 6B illustrates one embodiment of a compare display.

Figure 6C illustrates one embodiment of a compare display.

Figure 7 illustrates one embodiment of a flow chart of a compare display process.

20 Figure 8 illustrates one embodiment of a flow chart of a user selection process.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Systems and methods which represent various embodiments and example applications of the invention will now be described with reference to the drawings. Variations to the systems and methods which represent other embodiments will also be described. In one disclosed embodiment, the systems and methods are used to compare product information and are described in the context of a cruise selling and booking system. The inventors contemplate that the present invention is not limited by the type of environment in which the product information is compared and that other types of environments may be used, such as, for example, a real estate system, an airline travel system, a car rental system, a car sales system, as well as any other type of system that sells and/or provides information about various products and/or services. The figures

25

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and descriptions, however, relate to embodiments of the invention wherein the product information is cruise package and pricing information.

The present invention relates to systems and methods for comparing multiple sets of information in a compare display. One embodiment of the invention includes a system for displaying cruise package and pricing information in side-by-side windows wherein the user may replace the contents of each of the windows with an alternate selection of cruise package and pricing information. The compare display enables the users to compare accurately the detailed cruise package and pricing information.

One benefit of one embodiment is that users may select among a variety of cruise package options permitting the user to view a myriad of available cruise package and pricing information. A user may display information from different cruise lines, cabin categories, rate options, and so forth.

Another benefit of one embodiment is that users may compare detailed information about the cruise package and pricing information in the compare display such that as the user scrolls through the information of one set of cruise package and pricing information, the corresponding information of the other cruise packages is also displayed.

An additional benefit of one embodiment it that the user may replace one cruise package with another allowing for the comparison of even more cruise packages.

An further benefit of one embodiment is that the user is able to find and book cruises in a more efficient manner saving time. The cruise selling and booking system provides a tool for readily accessing up-to-date, accurate cruise information without spending the large amount of time often required when telephoning the cruise lines one-by-one to collect cruise information and to book a cruise.

In one embodiment, these features are integrated into a cruise selling and booking system that assists agents and customers with finding cruises that meet the customers' preferences. Furthermore, the cruise selling and booking system facilitates the ability of the customers and agents to compare accurately the various cruise packages.

I. Overview

In one embodiment, the systems and methods may be used in the context of a cruise selling and booking system 110. Figure 1 illustrates the cruise selling and booking system 110 of one embodiment wherein a plurality of customers, agents, and cruise lines interact with a cruise selling and booking system 110 via communication mediums 120 such as the Internet 125. Cruise lines may interact directly with the cruise selling and booking system 110 and/or via a cruise line interface system 130. The cruise selling and booking system 110, in the illustrated embodiment, provides an interactive tool for compiling, reviewing, and processing information obtained from the cruise lines, customers, and agents. The customer is provided with information about various cruises packages and may book a cruise package utilizing components of the cruise selling and booking system 110 through interaction with an agent.

Using the agent computer, as illustrated in Figure 2A, the agent accesses the components of the cruise selling and booking system 110 to find information about the customer, to provide the customer with information about cruise sailings from the cruise line database 234, and to book cruise packages as desired by the customer. Additionally, the agent may view multiple sets of cruise package and pricing information in a compare display for side-by-side comparison.

In one embodiment, a customer may also access the cruise selling and booking system 110 without necessarily interacting with an agent as illustrated in Figure 2B. For example, a customer may access the cruise selling and booking system 110 via a web based service by utilizing a standard web browser on his own computer to connect to the cruise selling and booking system 110 web page. In one embodiment, should the customer desire the assistance of an agent, the cruise selling and booking system 110 may store the information entered by the customer in the database collection. An agent with access to the cruise selling and booking system 110 may subsequently retrieve the information. This feature provides improved customer/agent interactivity by saving the customers from repeating information which was previously stored in the cruise selling and booking system 110 to each agent with whom they interact. As it is recognized that both customers and agents may access the cruise selling booking system, the term “users” will be used herein to refer to customers and/or agents.

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